

Senate Panel Approves Bill On Privacy

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The Senate Subcommittee on Constitutional Rights yesterday approved a bill by Chairman Sam J. Ervin Jr. (D-N.C.) to outlaw military surveillance of civilians.

Ervin, announcing the action, criticized the Defense Department for its opposition to a bill that would outlaw practices it has said have ended.

"If they're not doing it, and don't want to do it, and certainly shouldn't do it, then why are they so against the bill?" Ervin asked in remarks prepared for a Senate speech.

Ervin said the Pentagon opposition centered on a provision making willful violations of the act a crime, but also had reservations about almost every other provision.

"A military surveillance bill without a sanction is not worth the paper it's written on," said Ervin. He has maintained that the military kept files on political dissidents and activist groups, as well as a number of individuals.

Ervin's bill would outlaw actions by military agents in investigation of civilians, as well as record keeping by the military on such actions.

Ervin said President Nixon had declared himself totally opposed to such activities and the Defense Department had produced regulations to end the practices.

"I therefore find it absolutely astounding that despite all of its public pronouncements, the executive branch cannot bring itself to disavow once and for all the use of military agents to conduct surveillance of the political activities of civilians," he said.